UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

IMAGERY AND ADULT LEARNING

BY

VERNA GREGSON ©

A THESIS

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IN

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

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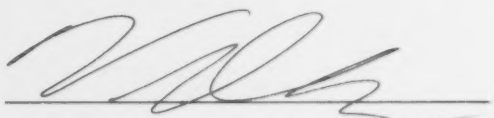

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Abstract

This qualitative research study explored the role of image making in the process of accessing, expressing and understanding the learning that occurs during adult life transitions.

Three adult visual artists engaged in an experience of visualization and creation of personal imagery. The resultant images were explored as to their role in current transitional life experiences for each individual. Three common themes emerged in the study. These are the ease of connection to the imagery, the personal significance of the imagery, and the limitations of the cultural and educational context in which we currently experience imagery.

When the participants were invited to relax physically and focus their concentration there was, in all cases, an experience of imagery spontaneously presenting itself in graphic and sensual detail in their imaginations. The images seemed laden with meaning and personal significance, which invited exploration of ideas and understanding that lay beyond immediate and obvious interpretation. The recollection and visual expression and creation of these images, in media of their choice, aided in grasping their importance and implications in present situations or transitional experience. Image making emerged as a method of conceptualizing and objectifying inner sensations so that they could be examined and explored in conscious rational terms.

This process of accessing our own inner knowing through exploration of our perceptions and critical reflection on our emotional sensations is not often encouraged in our current society and educational system. The aesthetic or creative dimension of education and society seems to have been over ruled by scientific realism.

There is a need for balance and acknowledgment of the artistic side of our nature. It is important for adults to be encouraged to participate in artistic endeavors as a way to accelerate their growth processes and bring their development into conscious awareness. Most adults tend to search externally for meaning, but the participants in this study each expressed in their own way that there could be meaningful images available from within.

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CHAPTER I

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Introduction

Born innocent, one

- that's I -

strives hard to become

an adult, no longer childish,

worldly-wise

in one's art, one's love,

one's life . . .

Then discovers:

that no one ever

becomes an adult,

becomes either

delightfully childlike

or pitifully juvenile . . .

Discovers:

one's art to be outside the art game

one's faith outside the religious game

one's love outside the sex game

Discovers:

one's own little song

and dares to sing it

in all variations,

unsuited as it may be

for mass communication . . .

For perhaps:

here and there

someone will hear it

and listen

and know

and say

Ah!

Yes!

Franck, F. (1981). Art as a way. New York: Crossroad.

Significant life events, important learnings or critical changes that are experienced by an adult often remain difficult to express verbally. They remain subliminal to conscious thought and frequently remain amorphous or unformed linguistically. Often they exist as images in memory that become symbolic of deeper information and understanding. One wonders, as we progress in our understanding of adult education, if we can discover a bridge between the conscious expression of thought, in the form of language, and a more primal, colorful and pictorial form of expression.

This research explored the role of visual image making in accessing, expressing and understanding the learning that occurs in the experience of adult life transitions. It explored the role of image making, such as painting, sculpting or photography, in the process of acknowledging and understanding adult life transitions. In this study, I show that image making facilitates an identification of awareness and an objectification of personal understanding during times of change in adult life.

It seems that as adults in contemporary society we exist in and form a balance between at least two worlds throughout our lifetime. The first world is the endogenous and private realm of an individual's own sensations and feelings. It originates from within and is the unconscious inner world of emotion, impression, and personal psychic identity. The second world is the exogenous realm that exists outside of the individual. It is the world of facts, material objects, public space and the roles we play. In other words, it is the

external world of profession, lifestyle, personal relationships, and physical functioning. If existence in the external world disturbs, fragments or alienates the internal world, the individual may be rendered confused or ill-adapted to continue in their chosen or expected life path. No amount of control or intellectual understanding of logical or factual relationships will alter that.

The inner reality of an individual is comprised of imagal memories that represent past experience, sensation, impression and inner knowledge (Whitmont, 1991). A symbol, as used in this study, refers to an object or an image that may be familiar in everyday life, but suggests or leads to that which is beyond an immediate or obvious rational understanding. Jung (1964) believed perception and understanding through symbolism was a basic mode of human functioning. In day to day life, questions and dilemmas may be solved by encountering inspirations or ideas that spring from the unconscious. As the conscious mind explores an image, it is led to ideas and understandings that are beyond the reach of immediate logic. The recollection and visual expression of these images may aid in grasping their meaning and implication in present crisis or transitional learning experiences.

The purpose underlying the use of image making is to establish a method of conceptualizing and objectifying these internal sensations and experiences so that they may be brought forward into consciousness and expressed as symbols. They can then be examined and explored verbally in more rational terms. The assumption is that we have an active nonrational

life full of images of which we are only partially aware. If we could learn a method of accessing this information more regularly, perhaps it would help us approach the decision points in our lives with deeper personal understanding and assist us in our self education. This method of making images to express our inner growth and personal learning could be very useful in the field of adult education.

Art therapy and image making have frequently been used with children to express their emotional state of being. The reason for the acceptance of this practice in working with children might be that we believe children to be unsophisticated in their cognitive and linguistic skills. Expression through art requires little verbal ability. Adults also, in times of transitional crises, can often be linguistically unsophisticated, especially when attempting to describe or understand their own internal processes. Perhaps, if adults are given the tools of visual image making, they could more easily express and understand their own internal dynamics. Symbolic imagery may be able to assist or at least precede a conscious understanding and verbal expression of the transitional learning experience.

This study is important because we live in a rapidly changing society, where adults are continually being forced to make major adaptations in their personal and professional lives. A significant aspect of adult life transition is in the realm of personal learning, where family life, spiritual belief, and personal philosophy are constantly undergoing examination and alteration.

The process of individuation (the coming to terms with one's inner self) requires that an individual strive to differentiate between the superficial influences of external society and the internal knowledge and understanding of one's own being. Once one understands the dynamics of the internal world, the relationship to the external world is altered. Perhaps adults who are experiencing a crisis or learning transition as part of the process of individuation can access their own expertise and understanding through the use of imagery.

Research Question

To what extent is it possible for adults to process their understanding of life transitions through image making?

The following questions also guided the study:

Is image making a meaningful process in this context?

To what extent is image making meaningful?

To what extent can image making be encouraged and used in educational endeavors?

Assumptions

The following assumptions are inherent in the study:

1. Participants in the study are willing, honest and open in their responses to the extent that this is possible for them.

2. Participants are well informed on the topic and their knowledge and experiences can be accurately ascertained through interviews.

3. Participants are articulate and capable of understanding and responding to the study in a responsible manner.

4. Researcher is capable, honest, interested and informed about the topic.

Delimitations

The study was delimited to three adults who were self described practicing visual artists. No attempt was made to compare the media in which they worked, the training that preceded their work, or the quantity and distribution of their work. The study was delimited to reporting and assessing only the process involved in image making and no attempt was made by the researcher to analyze an underlying meaning or possible therapeutic significance of the images themselves.

Limitations

The following limitations have been identified that relate to the study:

Researcher Bias

The researcher acknowledges that personal assumptions and biases, as well as personal and professional experiences, influenced the research design and conclusions. A reflective journal was maintained by the researcher throughout the entire study for the purpose of recording personal responses, impressions, assumptions and insights. This assisted the researcher in becoming aware of and minimizing personal influences that might alter the results of the study.

Through each step of the data collection and analysis, the information, insights and emerging themes were presented to, scrutinized by and discussed with the participants for clarification and validation.

Sensitive Nature of Data

It is recognized that the personal, emotional and sensitive nature of the issues being researched may have influenced or altered the participants'

ability or willingness to recall, reflect upon and express their feelings, intuitions, experiences and thoughts regarding the processes involved.

The sensitivity of the data may also have influenced the researcher's ability to objectively understand and analyze the data that was presented. Regular participant verification of the accuracy of data recording and theme identification helped to reduce this concern.

The researcher also recognizes that it is not possible to access all relevant aspects of the issues under study and that it is therefore probable that other significant factors and influences do exist which remain unexplored.

Interviewing Skills

It is acknowledged that the interview data was probably influenced by the presence and personality of the researcher. In attempting to be supportive of the participant's experiences and their relaying of that information, the researcher undoubtedly affected the direction and content of the interviews.

The researcher's past training and experience in the creative visual arts provided for an ease of communication about the visual language of imagery.

Gender Disclosure Differences

Gender differences are an ongoing concern in the social issue of creativity and training in the visual arts. In this study, an effort was made to collect data from both genders.

Relationship with Participants

Prior to the commencement of the study, the researcher had not established a personal relationship with any of the participants. Because an interview involves close one-to-one interaction between researcher and participant, it is recognized this relationship strongly influences the amount and nature of the data collected. It is imperative that the researcher develop a rapport of trust and an atmosphere conducive to sharing (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990) and this process was given priority at all times. Trust was easily established in this study because the researcher was a member of the island community where the participants lived. Despite all efforts to maintain some distance and objectivity, the personal relationship that developed between researcher and participants during the interview process is recognized as a possible limitation of the study. In such instances, participants may tend to provide data that they feel will receive a positive response from the researcher.

Limited Generalizability

Due to the specific nature of this research, the generalizability of the data to other contexts or other situations is recognized as being limited. The underlying assumption of qualitative research is that individuals make meaning of their personal experiences and perceptions, creating their own multiple and relevant realities. These realities exist in the contexts from which they are created and, as such, must be explored, understood and recorded within those contexts.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions will apply:

Image making:

The creation of images which recall symbolic and critically significant happenings or events in the life of the participant.

Adult life transition:

A passage or change from one set of beliefs or life circumstances to another. This transition may be personal or professional.

Symbol:

That which suggests or alludes to a recognized but relatively unknown meaning or experience. A symbol is an object or an image that may be familiar in everyday life, but that suggests or leads to that which is beyond an immediate or obvious rational understanding. According to Jung (1964):

> . . . a word or an image is symbolic when it implies something more than its obvious and immediate meaning. . . As the mind explores the symbol, it is led to ideas that lie beyond the grasp of reason. (p. 4)

Need for the Study

This thesis will explore the role of image making in assisting adults to access and express their life experiences, all of which are educative, in terms of symbolic form, shape and color. Results of the study will provide information as to the potential role for expressive artistic activities via symbolic imagery in learning groups, educational institutions or business offices where there are adults who are undergoing the experience of transition in their lives and searching for an understanding of its place in both their internal and external worlds.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The focus of this study was to explore the role of visual imagery as a method of accessing, expressing and understanding adult life transitions. The participants in the research were asked to reflect on their own creative works and the significance of that imagery in their personal lives. They were asked to identify recurring imagery and explore its potential for symbolic representation of that which is beyond immediate or obvious rational understanding in their personal growth and transitional experiences. The emphasis was on discovery of the learning experienced through the process of creating personal imagery. This research project was conducted as a qualitative study (Bogden & Biklen, 1992), whereby the subjective aspects and individual interpretations of the participant's experience with imagery was explored.

Qualitative research designs do not begin with a theory, nor are they intended to prove or test a theory. Instead, they begin with the intent to access and explore an aspect of human experience that is psychologically rich and meaningful. The theory is allowed to emerge as the study progresses and is given substance and direction by the expressions and interpretations of the participants (Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh, 1990; Firestone, 1987; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Merriam; 1988; Merriam and

Simpson, 1984). The researcher is cast in the role of discoverer, knowing that the exploration will uncover greater meaning and understanding of the human experience.

A qualitative research approach is based upon the human interpretation of reality as being continually unfolding, multiple, flexible and contextual. That is, there is no one truth, but rather many truths, all dependent on the expression, the contributing circumstances, the setting and the perspectives of the participants. Qualitative research is primarily concerned with the perspectives of its participants and the meaning they attach to their own experiences (Bogden & Biklen, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990). According to Bogden & Biklin (1992), "qualitative research illuminates the inner dynamics of situations - dynamics that are often invisible to the outsider" (p. 32). It is committed to the concept that reality is constructed by each participant and consists of multiple and varied ways of interpreting events and experiences within that reality. The goal of qualitative research is to describe and understand those processes by which people discover meaning in their lives. As Patton (1990) suggests, "Qualitative inquiry cultivates the most useful of all human capacities - the capacity to learn from others" (p. 7).

A qualitative study uses the researcher as the primary data gathering instrument. The investigator uses a neutral inductive approach, remaining open to whatever emerges from the data, and attempting only to report and

understand things as they exist (Bogden & Biklen, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990). The role of the researcher is to approach the topic without preconceived ideas or theories and to allow the experience of the participants to unfold naturally and without interference. Following its mandate to study human behavior, qualitative research occurs in a natural setting, where the participants are able to interact in a normal and natural manner. The goal of the researcher is to enter and explore the psychological and experiential worlds of the participants and to record them without alteration. The investigator must become closely involved and engaged with the participants in their environment in order to better know and understand their perspectives and the meaning they attach to their experience, yet still allow the context to remain relatively unaffected and unaltered by the presence of the researcher.

Recruitment and Selection of Sample

Participants were solicited using an interest form (Appendix A) which was distributed among a community of practicing visual artists living in the Gulf Islands of British Columbia. This site was chosen because it is the residence of the researcher, it is the home of many practicing visual artists

and it provided access to psychological counselors, if needed during the project. Recruiting was directed toward adults, male and female, over age 30 years, of varying artistic disciplines and media, but who did not describe themselves as professional artists.

Nine adults (six females and three males) completed and returned the interest forms. Each applicant was contacted in person by the researcher for a brief discussion of the project and their interest in it. From this group, three participants (two females and one male) were selected for the study based on the following criteria:

1) The individual's ability and willingness to reflect on and discuss changes and transitions in their personal life;

2) The individual's ability and willingness to discuss openly their personal use of imagery;

3) The degree to which an individual was willing to intuitively explore their use of imagery and its implications;

4) The individual's stated motivation for engaging in the study (individuals seeking therapeutic intervention were not included);

5) The researcher's desire to include participants representing a variety of artistic disciplines;

6) The researcher's desire to include participants representing both male and female gender;

7) The willingness of the individuals to commit time to participate in the study.

"Participant Consent Forms" (Appendix B) were completed by the individuals who volunteered to participate in the study. This form outlined the purpose and intent of the study, time frame and structure of the interviews, confidentiality issues, and their rights as participants.

Description of Participants

Joanne, a female in her early forties, has been involved in artistic imagery for about 15 years, but has only recently begun to pursue it on a serious and full time basis. What began as a casual interest for purposes of personal documentation, has now grown into a career. She works from a studio in her home and is self supporting. Joanne describes herself as being unsure of her credibility as an artist, remembering her early attempts at drawing where she felt unable to match the apparent skill of her peers. She states that the majority of her creative development occurred in her adult years, when she was able to overcome the block of being unable to draw representationally. At this time, her primary interest in imagery is portraiture, although she also often works with subjects from nature. She has had some technical training in the arts and continues her professional artistic development through personal research. Joanne is open, friendly and caring

in her approach to life. She was very willing to explore and share her experiences with creative imagery.

David, a male in his mid forties, has worked with imagery for about ten years. He enjoys creating images of trees and landscape, especially the natural landscape that surrounds his studio and his home, where he lives with his partner and children. He has some formal training in art, but for the most part is self taught. He remembers enjoying art as a young child, but was not encouraged to pursue it through school. As he became older, his interest in the visual arts was rekindled. David is articulate and willing to talk about his personal imagery and his process, despite his reticence regarding his own artistic abilities. He is able to be deeply reflective in his exploration of the creative experience and the meanings attached to it.

Marilyn, a female in her late forties, creates abstractions from nature. She remembers taking pleasure in drawing as a very young child, but soon lost that due to an inability to draw "perfectly". Following the successful pursuit and subsequent abandonment of a science career, she rekindled her creative interests at mid life. She has taken some classes in drawing and painting, but has no formal art training. Marilyn's studio is in her home, which she now shares with a male partner. She, too, carries feelings of inadequacy about her creative abilities, but says she is learning to express herself more

freely and with less self judgment. She was willing and anxious to discuss her imagery and art work and the significance it has taken on in her life. Although still employed part-time elsewhere, she looks forward to a time when she can devote full time to her art.

Data Gathering

Each participant met with the researcher on at least two occasions (one telephone and one face-to-face contact) prior to the commencement of the taped interview. At these initial contacts, the researcher explained the nature and purpose of the study, as well as the context of involvement for the participants. The Participant Consent Form (Appendix B) was signed at this time. Three personal interviews, each about 1 hour in duration and ten days apart, were then held with each of the participants. In all cases, we met in their home/studios at a time when we could work alone, without interruption. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher immediately afterward. A copy of their transcript was delivered to each participant prior to the next meeting as a validity check to ensure referential adequacy. The participants were questioned as to whether this data adequately and accurately represented their own feelings and statements as

expressed to the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Time was taken prior to each interview for the researcher and participants to share their personal feelings, attitudes and responses to the topic and processes involved in the discussions. This was repeated at the completion of each interview. Insights, questions, impressions and themes were recorded in the researcher's journal following every interview.

In the first interview, the participants were asked a series of open-ended questions (Appendix C), encouraging them to discuss their prior experience with imagery, their feelings about their own personal artistic work, and any changes that have occurred in their pursuit of creativity. In addition to providing a great deal of information about each participant, this initial interview established a rapport and a comfortable sense of trust between participant and researcher. At this meeting the participants were asked if there were any personal symbols or images that seemed important or were recurring in their art work. Each was readily able to identify an image or series of images common to their work and expressed an interest in further exploration of this imagery.

The second interview began by reflecting on the transcript of the previous meeting and any insights that had emerged for the participants. We then moved to a focus on specific personal imagery using a process of relaxation and interactive guided imagery. The premise of this exercise is that the unconscious mind has valuable information and knowledge that can

become available to the conscious mind when cognitive limitations are removed through a process of physical relaxation and focused attention.

In the interactive guided imagery, the researcher invited each participant to sit in a comfortable position, to practice deep, slow breathing and to concentrate on becoming completely relaxed. After approximately five minutes, when they indicated that physical relaxation had been achieved, they were asked to allow an image to enter their minds and to focus their attention on that image. This could be their ideal image of a subject for their art work, a favorite image they had previously created, an image they were currently exploring in their art work, or an image that simply volunteered itself in that moment. It was to be an image that presented itself at the time, not one they had preselected or analytically chosen. Once the image had been identified and full attention focused on it, the participants were asked to describe it in detail, including its physical appearance and their emotional and intuitive responses to it. Next they were asked a series of questions (Appendix D) about their image and their understanding or intuitions regarding its meaning for them in their lives. In this second interview, the participants thus explored, interpreted and analyzed their own imagery, its importance for them and their responses to it. Through this process of amplification and imagination, the participants placed cognitive labels on their images, which could then be called personal symbols. Following this interview, both David and Marilyn chose to reproduce their images on paper

and these were photographed by the researcher. Joanne preferred to allow her image to remain in her imagination, but expressed a desire to reproduce it at a later date. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality for the participants, the photographed images have not been included in this document.

Interview three began with reflection and discussion of the transcript from interview two and then continued with an open discussion of the participants' experience about the process and outcome of each meeting. No structured questions were used for this interview. It was a time for the participants to express their own thoughts and feelings about the implications of the imagery they experienced at the previous meeting and how it fit into their lives. Each seemed surprised at the ease of the reflective process and the profound understanding revealed in their personal experience of image making.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research design evolves and emerges simultaneously with the collection of data. The process is based on "theoretical assumptions (that meaning and process are crucial in understanding human behavior, that descriptive data are what is important to collect, and that analysis is best done inductively) and on data collection traditions (such as participant observation, unstructured interviewing, and document analysis)" (Bogden &

Biklen, 1992, p. 58). Qualitative analysis methods employ a process of inductive logic, centered on an open-ended exploration of the data and the discovery of common patterns, concepts or experiences. This is a process which requires the researcher to rely upon their own individual "intelligence, experience and judgment" (Patton, 1990, p. 406).

In this study, analysis was conducted according to the constant comparative method whereby data collection and informal evaluation occurred concurrently as an ongoing and interactive process. The data was assessed by the researcher, looking for key issues, recurring themes, and general categories. Each interview was guided by the themes presented from the data previously assembled. Formal theory development occurred following the completion of all data collection and theme identification. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss (1987), the constant comparative method is a research process in which the analysis is ongoing throughout the entire study and has nearly reached completion when all the data has been collected. A description of the data analysis process undertaken in this study is outlined here.

Once each interview was concluded and transcribed, the researcher highlighted the meaning units, or significant statements, in the dialogue and paraphrased them individually to ensure a clear understanding of the responses of the participants. The paraphrased meaning units were then categorized according to code words that signified and represented the

content. When the coding was complete, the meaning units, paraphrasing and category codes were organized in adjacent columns on each page to increase audit clarity and to facilitate assessment of the relationships therein. This was returned to the participants for verification. Following the paraphrasing and category coding, the major themes emerging from the data were explored and developed with participant validation.

The researcher maintained a reflective journal of observations, insights, intuitions throughout the entire investigative process.

Ethical Considerations

During the collection and analysis of research data, ethical issues must be carefully considered and addressed (Merriam, 1987). Research done under the direction of the Department of Educational Policy Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, must first be reviewed and found acceptable by a department ethics review committee. A proposal of this study was duly submitted and approved. Additional ethical considerations are listed below.

Informed Consent

Prior to commencement, all participants were provided with both a verbal and a written explanation of the research study, discussing its nature, aims and methods, and their role as participants. They were informed of the potential benefits and/or risks involved, such as the encounter with possibly intense emotions, due to the very personal nature of the research. All participants were asked to sign a Participant Consent Form (Appendix B), seeking their permission as a research participant and laying out the terms of the study. All participants were volunteers who freely agreed to serve in the research study and who were informed of the obligations and responsibilities of both themselves and the researcher.

Option to Withdraw

Before commencing the study, the researcher reviewed with each participant the clauses in the Participant Consent Form outlining their option to withdraw from the study, to answer only those questions with which they were comfortable, and to stop an interview at any time.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Participants were given a written guarantee assuring their anonymity. In all cases, pseudonyms were used throughout the study and all personally identifiable data were held in strict confidence by the researcher. Participant

consent forms, along with interview tapes, were kept in a locked file in the office of the researcher. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher, and any references to names, residence or place of employment were deleted from the transcript. On completion of data analysis, all tapes of recorded interviews were erased. Participants were informed that the data and analysis would be used for a master's degree thesis in adult education at the University of Alberta and may also be presented in journal publications or at professional conferences.

Well-being of Participants

Due to the nature of the study, participants were advised that they may undergo emotionally intense experiences during the course of the research. Each was advised that the researcher was not a therapist and that they may wish to consult a professional counselor, if needed. They were assured of the opportunity to opt out of the study at any time. All participants and their privacy were treated with respect by the researcher during all phases of the study. Only those areas directly related to the present study were explored.

Establishing Trustworthiness

In qualitative methods of research, the very nature of the subject matter is profoundly relativistic, focusing on the perceptions, impressions and experiences of the participants. This is a research methodology which demands the sensitive and intuitive treatment of a human investigative instrument who is able and willing to interact on a personal and interpretive level of involvement with the participants and the emergent data. It remains essential, however, that qualitative research uphold and maintain the highest standards of trustworthiness and rigor if it is to warrant placement in the ranks of scientific investigation.

Using participant verification, the transcripts, analysis and interpretation of the emergent themes was presented regularly to the participants for their perusal and comments as to accuracy and relevance (Miles and Huberman, 1984). These ongoing member checks assured the validity of data collection and analysis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1987; Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh, 1990). Due to the highly interpretive nature of qualitative research, the emergent interpretations, patterns, themes and theories must be continually verified with the participants from which they were solicited to ensure against misrepresentation, misunderstanding or ethical violation. Use of a variety of data sources, such as observation, interview transcripts and the research journal, allowed for a comparison of

test results from a number of different perspectives (Denzin, 1978). Referential research materials consisting of tape recordings of the meeting sessions, photographs of the images, and researcher notes of impressions and insights gained during the process were useful for interpretational testing of analysis and evolving themes (Eisner, 1991). Peer debriefing (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) with professional colleagues, including the research supervisor from the University of Alberta and an adult educator from Simon Fraser University, was helpful for the researcher to receive methodological advice and to discuss emergent concepts.

The inclusion of thick and richly descriptive dialogue (Lincoln and Guba, 1981; Psathas, 1973) supplied detailed information about the context and experience of the participants, allowing them to come alive to the reader. Qualitative data, says Patton (1990), must be "sufficiently descriptive that the reader can understand what occurred and how it occurred" (p. 26). This allowed the researcher to develop a conceptual thematic framework which could be communicated to other professionals and compared to other similar contexts and situations.

Dependability and stability of the data are concerns of qualitative inquiry because this style of research readily accepts the idea that different realities are continually being accessed, and because of instrumental shifts due to developing insights on the part of the researcher. To overcome this, all methodological steps and decision points were recorded by the

researcher, and access to the raw data in its several forms is provided as an audit trail (Miles and Huberman, 1984). The use of participant discussion, photographed images and researcher notes provide some overlap of data for comparison purposes and triangulation (Merriam, 1987; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Husband and Foster, 1987; Campbell and Stanley, 1963).

Trustworthiness and rigor were further assured by the ongoing practice of reflexivity (Bogden and Biklen, 1992; Spradley, 1979) in the form of a reflective journal recording the impressions, intuitions, observations and assumptions of the researcher. In addition to the recording of the research methodology, a description of the process of analysis, as well as interpretation and organization of the data and emergent themes and conclusions were included.

CHAPTER III

CONNECTION TO IMAGERY

This and the next two chapters present the data and findings for this thesis. Three themes emerged. These are the ease of connection to the imagery, the personal significance of the imagery, and the limitations of the cultural and educational context in which we currently experience imagery.

The first major theme to emerge was that of connection to the imagery. When the participants were invited to take the time to relax and focus on their inner realms, there was, in all cases, an experience of imagery spontaneously volunteering and presenting itself in their imaginations. These images appeared without effort on the part of the participants and were exhibited in full and clear detail of line, form, color and sensation. In describing the imagery, the participants could, without any hesitation, provide vivid and graphically sensual details of the images. David describes his image as follows:

> It is misty and it is completely open. There is a bit of shrubbery along the sides. And there is this little boy with me. Lots of openness. Open sky and the water below. We are high, up very high, and it is very open. It is undefined, very undefined. There

are no things. There is just the water and this little kid and me and the shrubs. The shrubs are part of us, with us. But what is out there to look at is just openness. It is water and it is sky, but it is not intense. It is open to me and it is undefined.

Marilyn's image was an ocean tidal pool:

It is an image of a clear pool of water, part of the ocean. I have been walking on the beach and am now captured by this small pool of water. There are small stones and shells at the bottom and it is surrounded by large molded sandstone rocks. I am sitting on one of the sandstone rocks and looking down into the ocean pool. It is a warm, sunny day. There is no breeze and I am aware of the silence that is everywhere. . . The small stones and shells are beautiful! They are multicolored and multishaped, each one like a precious jewel. They shine in the sun and seem to fit perfectly with each other. Just like they were meant to be there, in perfect harmony with their surroundings and with each other. It is a very sensual image, sensual in its perfection and its intensity.

Joanne visualized a gathering of women at the water's edge:

> I see a beach with high cliffs and sculptured sand and rocks. There are cavern-like formations in the rock. It is very peaceful. And there are women there, many women of all ages. Young girls, mature women and older crones. They are all there together and there is such a sense of playfulness. They are playing and exploring, exploring the depth of the caverns, the water's edge, the grass, the sand, the beach. It is very sensual. Everyone is just enjoying just being together. There is no judgment; they are just there together. They are dancing and they are free. Dancing in the sand. Twirling and cartwheeling. There is a strong feeling of playfulness. It is very sensual in feeling, very lovely.

The participants stated that the imagery simply appeared, unbidden and immediately, as soon as the opportunity was available. It was surprising to them that it happened so quickly and easily. At no time did the visualization experience seem contrived or manipulative for any of them. As Marilyn described it:

> It was just there! It just appeared! I wasn't even expecting to

see anything and there it was, an image as clear as could be.

David discussed the spontaneity of his experience:

> Our exercise of centering and focusing got right beyond any expectation. I wasn't expecting to see what I did . . . (I) immediately got over and through any expectations that might have been there. I just went right in there and did it, and then there were no expectations. But, son of a gun, there sure was a lot to see! . . . It popped into the narrative, into the visuals. I just saw it. It was just there, very clearly. . . . That image of open and undefined space seems to always be there. . . I do get there and it is never contrived. It happens very easily. . . . I don't consciously create the image, it just happens. Like it or not. There it is!

In mid conversation, Joanne exclaimed:

> Oh, an image just came into my head . . . !

In the research, the participants repeatedly expressed a strong sense of connection or communion with the images that presented themselves. In each case the imagery that appeared was comprised of the elements of nature and the beings that reside there. The connection to this imagery of the natural environment was intense, undeniable and rich with meaning for them.

Marilyn spoke of her communication with the energy in her image:

> It is as though the trees and rocks speak to me. Not in words, but with their energy. When I look at them, my mind sees their energy in brilliant colors and flowing vibrant patterns. . . . The energy is about growth and connection. Connection to the earth and growth that is fueled and driven by that connection, that energy.

Joanne discussed the way in which the image reflected her own life:

> I have always had such a sense of beauty when I am surrounded by nature and this image is filled with that beauty . . . This is a compilation of images of myself from childhood on through adult womanhood. It represents all the chapters of my life as

> a child and a woman. It explores all the places I have been and all the feelings I have felt.

David spoke of his sense of connection to the trees in his image:

> I feel their (the image) energy. I feel connected, connected to their energy. It is an energy of the earth. Being here with the trees reminds me of my connection to their energy. I share that connection with the trees. It is a strong and powerful connection.

The participants recognized the imagery as being driven by a force that compelled them to create, to capture, to reproduce and to own it. They suggested that it is the creative drive to recreate the imagery that provides meaning for them. The experience of seeing, responding emotionally and then capturing an image in an artistic medium seemed to amplify and enrich their experience of its personal meaning for them. Each stated this in their own way:

> I feel I would like to capture that sense of exploration of personal space and being in the surroundings (in the image),

that sense of playfulness. That sense of joyful exploration is not part of my life, right now. . . It feels that if I am (creating) something that is meaningful to me and that I can share with others, then it will create some dialogue and enrich the relationships even further. It is part of my growth, my personal growth. I learn a lot from my art and my interaction with the process. (Joanne)

It felt like the image was freed by the experience and by the exercise of relaxing and focusing. It was sort of connected to a spirituality, a centering . . . You are not searching for the imagery, you are not creating the images or fastening onto them, you are just letting them go. . . I feel quite lucky to respond strongly to (sensory) stimuli. I cherish that! There is no decision involved, it is just an immediate response. And that is the source of art for me. (David)

Well, it is a connection, a connection with the earth, a connection with the essence of life, a connection with an understanding of who I am, not just physically, but spiritually. It is very powerful. When I really get into my art, it is like

> getting in touch with the ultimate forces of my life. . . I try to capture and reproduce in imagery that understanding that is otherwise so fleeting, so easy to lose. I think my life would not have much meaning if I could not explore it by recreating it though my art. (Marilyn)

The participants expressed a knowledge that the visualization process and the resultant imagery was available to them at all times, but that they frequently neglected or denied its access. They acknowledged the impact of the image connection on their creativity and their self understanding, and all stated an urgent desire to remember to access the inner imagery more frequently. There was a sense of knowing that this is a facility that is valuable and available to them, but that they frequently become caught up in external or superficial ways of being and neglect the connection to their inner selves. David reflects:

> I think remembering to ask, to ask about the connection to nature, is important. Because I really tend to forget . . . I need to set up a space and just remember to ask for the connection . . . It is the remembering that is important. A personal space, an aura of connecting to the energy. . . Most

of the time I forget that energy. My life gets in the way and I become unconscious of it. The personal stuff of life gets in the way.

Marilyn sees her imaging experiences as a monitor of her way of being:

It (the image) would tell me that I can know this at any time I want to, if I can just be still and listen. There is nothing else I need to do in order to learn and understand. Everything I need to know is right here, if I just focus and pay attention. . . It is so easy to get caught up in the superficial aspects of life and these then show up in the (images). I usually know, though, because the art seems to feel forced, like it is not flowing. And then I have to stop and ask myself what is going on. Ask why I am not connected to my own artistic energy. It is a good barometer of my own honesty to myself and my energy. If I am being superficial or distracted, it shows up right away in the art.

Joanne commented on her response to the imagery:

> It was interesting because I got a lot of stimulation from the image. I brought it up at my . . . group and I cried for a long time. . . . How it came up was, after reading the last transcript, I felt like I wanted to go to my computer and write about my experience. But, I didn't do that. Instead, I went to bed. I started talking about that in my group and realized how I shut down the excitement and how I worry about everything. Like believing that I will be really tired tomorrow, or that if I get into it I won't want to stop and then I will definitely be tired, and all the stuff that comes in to say don't go down this path because you don't know what is there.

The exercise of guided relaxation and connection to personal imagery seemed to occur with ease and facility for each of the participants. Each reported that they were quickly drawn to the vivid aesthetic detail and the passionately felt sense of a crucial meaning and understanding inherent in the imagery. The images seemed laden with meaning and personal significance which invited exploration of ideas and understanding that lay beyond immediate and obvious interpretation. It is for this reason they were considered to be symbolic images.

CHAPTER IV

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE IMAGERY

The second major theme to emerge in the research was that of the significance of the imagery. In every case, the image that spontaneously presented itself for each individual during the relaxation exercise carried with it a meaning and a message that they recognized as having relevance for them. Personally significant messages had often remained hidden or submerged in daily life, clouded over by the superficial business in which they involved themselves. Participants had expressed feelings of being frequently immobilized in their personal growth and/or artistic development but, when working with the imagery, volunteered that there was a freeing and liberating process. Each acknowledged that the well of imagery which they had tapped represented a place of significant importance that seemed readily accessible to them. Marilyn speaks of the significance of self learning achieved through her imagery:

> My art is like a wise teacher, except that through it I teach myself. I can understand myself and come to a place of peace. It is very private, though. That is, it is only my experience and I don't think anyone else could learn anything from my art,

because it is about my process. It is as though I go to the art to learn about the really essential truths. And I can't even express those in words, they just show up in the images. And those images probably only have meaning for me. It is like I can say things through my art that I am unable to say through language, because I just don't know how. It is as though the art is a different language or a different form of communication altogether. It is very special! I cannot imagine being without the connection to the basic primal energy that it allows me to reach.

David speaks of his image as being, positive, filled with hope and important to his personal development:

It is a good place. It is filled with light, light and hope. It has energy like the trees. It is a creative place. I would like to come here again because of my curiosity and because of the hope. I am curious to see what my part is here. And I have hope that this place can help me to create, and to understand my creativity. . . . my visual imagery, the personal stuff, is important for me and my growth. I know that. So I have all these layers of stuff

to explore. This exploration of my own personal imagery is essential. And I have great hope for it.

Joanne also discusses her imagery in terms of significant personal learning and growth:

> It is part of my growth, my personal growth. I learn a lot from my art and my interaction with the process. It doesn't feel like I could survive without it anymore. It feels like it is part of me and something that I need to do all the time. I think the art provides that essential meaning. It is very important. . . it is that simple. It is something that I want to share and commune with.

The participants all acknowledged that the imagery that occurred had acted as a symbol of, or a bridge to, what each already knew deep inside, a nebulous, unformed but nevertheless intense knowing or sense of understanding about their life processes. When viewing the imagery, each expressed a recognition that the imagery spoke to them of immediate conditions or imminent changes in their life processes, their life paths or life directions. There was an expression of purpose about what they must now

do, or a clarity about the next step to take in their personal journey. Marilyn interpreted her image as a message of acceptance:

> It (the image) would tell me to be still and to listen and to watch. And it would tell me to accept, to truly and completely accept what is. To accept without trying to understand or change anything. Just complete acceptance. . . what I learned was really profound and totally appropriate to this time in my life. It has been a time of great change, huge transitions and I am still trying to figure out what it is all about. And, of course, I want to be in charge of it all, in control so there are no surprises and no risks. And the image that I connected with that day told me to just be still and let everything happen according to its own schedule. The image of the pool, with everything fitting together and working together so perfectly made me realize that I don't need to change or control anything. When I watched myself reach into the water to touch something, the image got all clouded and distorted. I just need to leave it alone. It was a perfect and very meaningful message.

David saw his image as presenting him with a graphic description of a personal life choice:

> There is an expectation in this (image), an expectation that I might leap off the cliff. But it is okay, or it might be okay. There is a death kind of thing, but it is a death related to change and transition. I am really on the edge of something in this. The edge of a transition. . . I am really unclear. If I leap off that cliff, I am really unclear about what I am taking with me and what I am leaving behind, because there is something about escapism and responsibility here for me. There is a certain meaningful attachment to this edge, too. It is very open and the possibilities are endless. If you are standing on that edge, you are a genius at waiting. Nothing is proven! It is a very safe place. And I have done that before. Sooner or later you have to step out and into it. I think I have come up to this edge before and then just wandered off and done something else. I have to either go ahead and fail, or experience it, or whatever.

Joanne connected with a desire for more joyfulness in her life:

> It (the image) would tell me not to be ashamed and to enjoy who

I am. I would say that I know, because I can see the beauty. And that I am honored to witness it. That I can see the beauty and the joy and I will try to remember that. . . It was this wild woman, Joy, who I had seen in the image, who I got in touch with. I realize just how far she is from my day to day life. That is why the grief. I have a desire to be in touch with her more within myself and also to awaken her in other women.

The participants expressed a resurgence of creative imagery and energy following the focusing sessions, saying that they felt renewed and re-energized in both personal and professional pursuits. There was, in every case a strong sense of optimism, of hope for future growth and understanding. The process of connecting with and exploring the imagery and their personal responses and reactions to it was stated as a desire to continue learning to connect with the imagery and a confirmation that they would use the information gained to enhance their personal understanding of the self.

David expressed impatience to continue his personal exploration through imagery:

> I look at my paintings and, yeah, they are spaces and I guess I am finding out that I might try to explore that more consciously. It is an exploration of inner space, not outer space, but definitely inner space. It is going in, going in psychologically. I think I am aware that that is my exploration. Going into the space in the painting is going into myself. And I want to get on with it! I am impatient to find out what is in there. . . Exploring myself may not be good art. But it has to be done. It has to be done if I am going to create good art.

Joanne wants to share the excitement of the understanding gained through her image:

> I would like to be able to share this kind of image, have more people participate in it. I want to make it more accessible so more people can enjoy it. It represents greater awareness, sharing, accessibility. This image is really important because it keeps recurring. It is growing, becoming bigger than me. I would like this kind of image to facilitate a connection of women to women, women to themselves, in body and in spirit. The joy these women experience in their dance is a symbol of that

> unification of the body and spirit. . . I will remember it and cherish it. When I think about it I get really excited. This could get really big. There is so much I could do with it. It just sort of glows when I think about it.

Marilyn expressed the positive affirmation received from her imaging experience:

> Whenever I have questions about what I am doing or where I am going, I just need to ask for an image. It is all there. All the answers! Everything I need to know. . . there is tremendous hope! It even goes beyond hope. It is a knowing that hope will be realized and fulfilled. It is a knowing that all is right and well and good and perfect. There is hope, too, in knowing that I have this connection that I can come to at any time. I just have to let myself do it.

CHAPTER V

CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

The third major theme of the research was the limitations found in the use of imagery in the cultural and educational background for each participant. The aesthetic or creative dimension of education seems to have been over ruled by science, fact and technique for the individuals in the study. Both at home and at school they were taught that art activities were merely something to fill the time when there was nothing more important to do. The participants all stated that their school training had included little or no exploration of imagery and the arts. Art was something left until all the real work was done. Artistic pursuits were considered to be frivolous and rather foolish. Marilyn discusses the low priority of aesthetic experience during her schooling:

> Oh, I always enjoyed art as a child, a young child. . . As I got a little older I began to view drawing as a rather childish pursuit, something only little kids who didn't know any better did, and that confirmed my determination not to enter into any artistic activities. That, of course was confirmed at school, because we only had art classes when there was nothing more important to

do, like on Friday afternoons, or just before the holidays, or when we had finished all our other work. It was only a diversion to keep us distracted when there was no real school work to do.

David grew up with the belief that art was a waste of time:

Well, I enjoyed it as a kid. . . But, by the time I got into high school, it was pretty much over. There was no reinforcement and I, as a kid, would pretty much go along with things and the art got dropped by the wayside. . . There is a cultural backdrop that I grew up with . . . the unconscious notion that art is a waste of time.

Joanne does not recall much artistic exploration during her school years:

I had always had an interest in doing creative things. But it was mostly after I was away from school since I used to get sent out in the hall in art classes. It was because I talked too much, so I didn't ever get to explore art in high school. I can't really remember having much art in school.

In those times when they did produce images, the standards of societal acceptance required that the imagery be scientifically correct, accurate, and fully representative of reality as it was currently seen to be. This seems to have been seriously inhibiting, instilling in these individuals a belief that they did not possess the appropriate skills to create their own imagery.

Joanne's early experience led her to doubt her own creative abilities:

> I didn't find it easy to draw anything and that was a block that lead me to say that I wasn't creative. I continued to say that I wasn't creative for about twenty years, up until about five years ago.

Marilyn grew up believing that only representationally accurate drawings were acceptable:

> I stopped because I was afraid I couldn't do it well enough. I was a perfectionist by then and had begun to realize that my drawings did not represent reality accurately, that I did not have the skill to do that, so I stopped. . . I used to try to draw and paint realistically because that is what I thought real artists did.

David still finds himself critically judging his own creative imagery:

> I am quite willing to accept my own imagery whatever it is, but then I start to decide whether it is interesting or not. Perhaps too soon. And the fact that it may not conform with my ideas of what imagery would occur to an 'artist'. All that stuff. And that is just baggage. . . I find I have very little confidence in my ability to compose (imagery). . . I am very lacking in confidence.

This early training followed the participants into later life where, despite that fact that they now all pursue artistic activities on a nearly full time basis, they still carry guilt about wasting their time with art.

David acknowledges that his culturally imbued work ethic is a barrier to his personal creativity:

> I am aware that my notions of success and my relationship to success are part of my being stuck. There is no doubt that I have stopped myself from being successful. . . And sometimes I wonder if I haven't been playing around long enough at painting

that I really do know how to do it. I sometimes think I am creating more difficulties than there are. And it is because of my moral expectations about work.

Marilyn had always believed that part of maturity included a focus on the scientific rather than the artistic or expressive:

> . . . I remember feeling rather satisfied with myself that I was able to get beyond the silliness of art and concentrate on the real world of science. It seemed like a responsible route to follow, which was part of the climate in which I grew up. And now I am right back in it, the art that is.

Joanne, too, struggles with a work ethic learned from an early age:

> . . . the work ethic gets in the way. It comes back to what we were taught about what was important and what was valuable, what was lazy, what was irresponsible. And play was always irresponsible, even when we were kids because we couldn't play until we got the chores done. It would be so much easier to do the work if we could accept it as play. My resistance to play is major! It comes from a real fear place, I think. A fear that if I

just play, something terrible will happen.

Each of the participants expressed a belief that they will only gain credibility as artists if they become commercially successful, this being the mark of achievement in our society. The activity of image creation tends to be superseded by other apparently pragmatic pursuits or activities that are more socially acceptable and redeemable. Self criticism, anxiety and discouragement seem to become obstacles to the confidence and commitment needed for individuals to access, develop and express personally significant imagery. Joanne discusses her experience with current criteria used to judge artistic imagery:

> There were a lot of entries in the show, a lot of sort of avante garde works that I guess made some sort of social statement. But I didn't really like a lot of them and I still don't understand how the powers that be declare something artistic and something else not. I really don't understand that. I don't know where they get their criteria from . . .

David longs for the credibility of public acceptance of his work:

> There are objective rules about making imagery that I am guilty

> of breaking and I can see why people want to learn what the rules are because then you can make a more impressive image. . . . I would really like to know how to make pretty pictures that everyone would want to buy. . . Of course, I don't know what the "real" artists do. Maybe some of them just indulge themselves in complete selfish devotion to their art.

Marilyn discusses her need to justify the creative aspects of her life:

> We seem, in our society, to believe that people who work with art are sort of flaky and irresponsible. That is why I feel that I have to have a "real" job, just to justify my credibility that I really am an intelligent and responsible person. And, of course, when I work at my real job, I don't have much energy left for creativity. Only if I was an artist who consistently sold a lot of work for a lot of money, could I truly achieve social acceptance for what I do creatively. And it would have to be a lot of money. Just earning a modest income as an artist still doesn't make it for acceptance.

Our participants have described their struggle with the cultural and educational climate in which they were taught about the value, or lack thereof, of art and creative experiences in imagery. As each of them now pass

through the mid-life stage, they question these cultural norms and suggest that they have become somewhat more comfortable with their own use of expressive imagery.

> If I had an image of a real thing, a real object, I could visually explore my interpretation of landscape or the mountains or the nude. Which is my concept of what visual artists do, but I am now getting the sense that this may not be so. (David)

> When I am doing it, it is a process of discovery and I really enjoy that. When I can just settle into discovery I can really enjoy it. It is play! But I don't have an easy play mode in me. So I think that it shifts me into play mode and that is when I find the aliveness and enthusiasm and joy. There are new discoveries and the child comes out in me. (Joanne)

> When I went back into art as an adult, I understood that it didn't matter if my work represented reality and that, in fact, I was not even sure what reality was anymore. I began to know that reality was just an interpretation, based on our own experiences and understandings. My art now represents the reality of the process That is reality for me now. (Marilyn)

CHAPTER VI

REFLECTIONS ON RELEVANT LITERATURE

A symbol is that which implies or alludes to a recognized but relatively unknown meaning or experience. It is an object or an image that may be familiar in everyday life, but that suggests or leads to that which is beyond an immediate or obvious rational understanding. According to Jung (1964):

> . . . a word or an image is symbolic when it implies something more than its obvious and immediate meaning. . . As the mind explores the symbol, it is led to ideas that lie beyond the grasp of reason. (p. 4)

Art has been used extensively in our society as art therapy with disturbed children and, in some cases, with adults involved in deep psychotherapy. In addition, symbolic meaning and expression has been an accepted process in many cultures and societies that are less industrialized and scientific than our Western world. There, art provided an experiential knowledge that was immediate and that became an integral and significant part of daily life (Ross, 1986). In earlier societies, symbolic images were used to represent critical passages from one stage of life to another. They were

used to represent belief systems, religion, values, spirituality, and the interaction of those issues with day to day living (Campbell, 1990). Aboriginal cultures frequently utilized the aesthetic experience to harmonize the inner and outer realities of an individual, thus developing a heightened sense of awareness and appreciation for the pictorial expression of the interchange between the internal and external worlds (Ross, 1986; Brunton, 1987). Carl Jung (1964), in his recognition of the occurrence and function of significant imagery, states:

> I found that associations and images are an integral part of the unconscious, and can be observed everywhere - whether the (person) is educated or illiterate, intelligent or stupid. . . . They form a bridge between the ways in which we consciously express our thoughts and a more primitive, more colorful and pictorial form of expression. (p. 32)

The drive to connect with and express imagery in paint, clay, pencil, or photograph seems to be a deeply rooted human compulsion and an existential necessity in coming to know and to give form to the essence of that which we see. Art is a profound and primal link which communes with the nature that surrounds us. Franck (1981) acknowledges this deeply rooted human propensity to express oneself through the medium of imagery and

suggests that this was a mode of expression readily accessible to individuals less encumbered by the judgments of their society than what is experienced today. In recent writings (1993), he says:

> . . . this primeval response to life has remained almost unchanged during these thirty thousand years. All it still requires is a surface to draw on, a simple tool to draw with, and the innocence of the human eye as it once was, before it was conditioned by school, church, or art course, or as it is once more when its innocence is retrieved and all its programming, its aesthetic alienation is overcome. (p. 17)

Connection to Imagery

Engagement in the process of creating images means allowing oneself the freedom to become totally involved in emotional symbology (Jones, 1992). Individuals can often produce tangible evidence of their experience by creating a picture, shape or color which words have been unable to describe. Freire (1970) believes that we truly assimilate and understand our personal realities by naming them, giving them an objective identity. If we look at image making as a process of expressing or naming our experience, we understand that the greatest creation of the artist is the artist himself (Fox, 1983). The introspective process of image making enters the participants into

a situation where their focus is upon their personal experience, rather than on a predetermined end product (Jones, 1992). That is, it is the process of introspective experience that is important, not the ability of the participant to create ideal or realistically representative images.

The connection to the imagery requires an undivided and alert wakefulness so as to be fully in touch with that which is being revealed. It necessitates a letting go of the conscious ego and the intellectual judgments of the mind in order to engage in meaningful participation with an image. With the suspension of judgment comes the mind's ability to be free of labeling and prejudice, thus allowing the ability to see all that is. By seeing and connecting with that which surrounds us, both consciously and unconsciously, we are finally able to see and understand that which is truly our own self nature (Franck, 1981). In examination of the image connection process, Jongeward (1994) says:

> What I mean by 'connecting with creative process' is an awareness of unfolding and revealing inner life through generating expressive forms for the purpose of restoring, supporting or enriching well-being. (p. 237)

The image becomes a private interaction between its creator and the external world. In the end, it is not the picture that is important, it simply bears witness to the truth of self knowledge and worldly understanding.

Significance of the Imagery

Symbolic knowing is action that is interpretive, intuitive and versatile (Witkin, 1974). It allows understanding to grow in complexity and elaboration to meet the adaptive demands made upon an individual in their interaction between the internal and external worlds. Through expressive behavior, an individual becomes acquainted with their own sensing abilities regarding their experiential interpretation of the world and their place within it (Witkin, 1974). The use of symbol creates spontaneous forms of interpretive understanding about unconscious processes and relationships. This imagery is an immediate and profound response to the ongoing experiences of living (Franck, 1993). Symbolic expression is a flexible and efficient way of organizing experience and making sense of our place in the external world.

Effective discourse about the emotional and perceptive experiences involved in a life crisis or transition is difficult, and often impossible. Our consciousness lacks an ability to conceive of an intelligence of feeling (Witkin, 1974), and our subjective experience lacks an adequate language with which to discuss it. There is a need to understand the epistemological significance of the process of feeling and its importance as a mode of knowing and

coping. The creation of artistic images might be described as the interaction between the unspoken needs of the individual and the expression of those needs as a satisfying and identifiable symbol. A true symbol (Jung, 1964) is not arbitrarily chosen but, rather, is a spontaneous expression of an experience that is slightly beyond the immediate grasp of the conscious awareness. Art does not reproduce what is already visible to our intellectual eye and our conscious mind. Instead it makes visible that which is hidden, obscured, veiled or denied by our conscious mind (Cameron, 1992). The creation of a symbolic image is an effort to make visible that which is nearly inexpressible in other terms (Birkhauser, 1980). In Jung, Jaffe (1964) states:

> The great artists of this century have sought to give visible form to the 'life behind things' and so their works are a symbolic expression of a world behind consciousness. Thus they point to the 'one' reality, the 'one' life, which seems to be the common background of the two domains of physical and psychic appearances. (p. 303)

The important question concerns how we come to know and be aware of any of our sensing and perceptual abilities. If we examine our descriptions of emotional experiences, we tend to use terms and metaphors that depict actual objects from our real and objective world (Witkin, 1974). Thus

expressions such as "pin-prick sensations", "weight on the shoulder", "wings on the feet" become expressions of an inner sensation which may be invoked through interaction between our internal and external worlds. The simple answer to the question of how we come to know any of our sensing is that we only know it in so far as we express our sensing in displacements into the object world, in so far as we project in it an "object medium". Sensing known is sensing expressed. The knowing that is resident in the unconscious speaks to us, not via a verbal language, but via imagery through dreams, fantasies and deep reflections, our aboriginal mode of perception and expression. The depiction of these images in media of pencil, paint, photography or clay provides a release of deep layers of understanding from the unconscious (Whitmont, 1991). That is, we can begin to achieve an understanding of our passionately felt sensations of meaning by recalling and expressing them in symbol form, whereby they are objectified into an identity for which we do possess a language of discourse. Through the use of expressive behavior an individual can come to know and understand the symbols stored in the inner world and give them form and meaning in the outer world. In his discussion of art, ethics and spirituality, Walker (1988) states:

> Moreover, important truths can be powerfully expressed and communicated in the beauty of artistic creation, many of them not

> expressible in intellectual form at all. The intellect tends to fragment truths into their component truths, separately considered, and in doing so often misses the main point, the composite meaning. (p. 58)

Transformation Theory in Adult Education

Transformation theory has recently taken a more prominent place in the field of adult education. The first of two major orientations is the cognitive theory of perspective transformation as proposed by Mezirow (1991). His view of transformation involves rational processes based on the dominance of the ego. It's aim is the recognizing, harnessing and restructuring of those unconsciously repressed elements of socialization that stand in the way of an individual's awareness of self. Critical reflection, directed toward the goal of self-actualization is the external process of becoming aware of the influences on how we think, act and respond.

The use of imagery correlates with the adult transformative theory of Mezirow (1991) when he suggests that metaphors are "concrete images" (p. 297) connected by "threads of continuity and congruence" (p. 297) to hidden and nonliteral meanings. If we expand the metaphor beyond strict literary terms to include the symbolic imagery that is thus described we come even closer to its deep and significant meaning. Mezirow (1991) suggests that critical reflection on personal metaphoric images is an important and powerful connection to our underlying beliefs, assumptions and personal

understandings. This process leads to transformative learning and emancipatory education:

> . . . recognition, identification and creation of metaphors by adult learners can be the occasion for critical reflection and transformative learning. Through metaphors, we can examine and exorcise the 'ghosts' of our socialization so that we can freely choose meanings out of which we want to live our lives . . . Metaphors provide perspectives that define how we construe meaning. Their power comes through the way they frame meaning and reinforces perspectives through bundling visual and other sensory characteristics attributed to a primary subject. Because of their capacity to persuade, seduce and socialize us to their selected perspectives, metaphors deserve primary consideration in any learning process that attempts to assist us in critical reflection of our presuppositions regarding meaningful primary subjects. (p. 296)

Mezirow (1991) states that transformative learning is facilitated though active participation in discourse and reflection. Through reflection and discourse with one's own metaphoric imagery, an individual is required to become actively involved in the examination of personal meaning

perspectives, the evaluation of perceptions and sensory influences, and the examination of the personal socialization process. Engagement in this process encourages a liberation of personal vision and a redefinition of standardized frameworks of meaning.

The second major orientation in adult transformation theory is an adaptation of the Jungian and post-Jungian framework as proposed by Boyd (1988) and Washburn (1988). Transformation, according to these theorists, is defined as a change in consciousness, allowing an individual to receive critical insights into the nature and origins of their being. They discuss this as an integrative process between the individual ego and the collective unconscious. The aim is contemplative insight, wholeness, and an illumination of the Self through receptivity to the internal and non rational forces of the collective unconscious, or the Dynamic Ground. These forces become known by nonrational means, such as symbols, primordial images and dreams. Washburn (1988) states that the collective unconscious is accessed:

> . . . when the power of the Ground flows, experience quickens, becoming alive and acute, if not tumultuous and overwhelmingly intense. Conversely, when the power of the Ground ebbs, experience slows, becoming pale, distant, and dull. The presence

> of the power of the Ground potentiates experience across all dimensions; the absence of this power depotentiates experience. (p. 111)

While the theories of Boyd and Washburn seek to integrate the unconscious with the ego or the rational, Mezirow's theory intends to uncover and make aware that which is already known but is repressed or submerged in the personal unconscious. Thus a change occurs when the deep structures of the psyche are accessed through symbol and image as they exist prior to language. The use of art as an educational tool is evident here, as the images that appear in the mind following relaxation can be examples of accessing a deeper unconscious structure in the psyche.

Cultural and Educational Context

Participation in creativity, imagery and the arts has now become divorced from the daily functions of education and living. It has become separated and alienated as something that can be practiced and appreciated only by a rare and gifted few. It is certainly not encouraged as an activity that is an integral part of the normal experience of living (Jagodzinski, 1986).

Our contemporary educational process largely denies artistic exploration and systematically sublimates the natural creative urges of our

students (Boras and Fishburne, 1986; Ross, 1986). By the time we have completed twelve years of schooling, we have been thoroughly indoctrinated into the prevalent beliefs about art and creativity being unimportant, irresponsible and unproductive (Jagodzinski, (1986). What little experience with imagery is allowed is severely judged as to its ability to accurately represent scientifically realistic pictures, rather than intuitively meaningful messages (Ross, 1986).

Education should not be for the purpose of indoctrinating us to become mechanized tools in a scientific world, but rather should encourage us to develop the human capacities of awareness, perception and appreciation for the existence which we share with all other aspects of our environment. Walker (1988) speaks as an educator:

> Artistic creation and appreciation are modes of discerning truths of many kinds, and powerful means of communication, . . . the fundamental rationale for aesthetic education turns on the inescapable relation of harmony, human well-being and the sensitivity to beauty - a sensitivity which is a knowing, and can be cultivated. This fact, for education, has been seen at least since Plato, but never affected school practice on a wide scale. Also, every pupil must be encouraged in aesthetic education, since every pupil's potential for humanness relies on her sensitivity to beauty, and education must be

directly concerned with this potential, granting it the highest importance. Moreover, there are not the few artistically inclined, and the 'others'. Every person can learn to express herself effectively and with great satisfaction in some form of art, if the learning is approached with flexibility, clarity and sensitivity. (p. 105)

Sardello (1992), in reflecting on Jung, suggests that the spontaneous creativity of the individual soul produces the work of art that is the human experience, which is then enhanced through education to become the cultural or world experience. The process of awakening to and connecting with the imagery of our world increases our capacity for experience and for openness to that which is essentially human. It is a manifestation of the self (Franck, 1981). Jongeward (1994) says:

As an organic, holistic process of life, creativity is connected with emergence and fulfillment of inherent potential, and as such needs to be valued, understood and allowed to flourish. Like a tree in the forest, human beings have a potential for growth and transformation that can contribute to the well-being of the earth. (p. 237)

Boyd and Myers (1988) suggest that personal transition involves acknowledging and understanding the dynamics of the inner and outer worlds. They see this as the responsibility of education. It involves a change in consciousness so as to receive critical nonrational insights from the inner self, leading to the development of meaningful and integrated relationships with self and others.

Imagery is a profound and irrepressible response and acceptance of life itself, regardless of the media in which it is expressed. Moore (1994) says that the act of experiencing and creating images directly shows what the soul is made of. Image creation is more than just making pretty and/or representational pictures. It is a process of identifying, connecting, assimilating and expressing the inner symbols of our individual truths. Franck (1993) concludes, "Seeing/drawing is more than making pictures: It is witnessing to this seeing, it is touching the Meaning" (p. 165).

CHAPTER VII

IMPLICATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

In reviewing and reflecting upon the findings of the study, three major themes developed. These included the ease of connection to the imagery, the personal significance of the imagery, and limitations in the cultural and educational context in which we currently experience imagery. The research has been summarized according to these themes.

Connection to the imagery

The first theme to emerge was the immediacy and spontaneity of the appearance of an image of importance for each participant when they undertook the exercise of relaxation, concentration and focus on their own inner sensations and feelings. It was intriguing to listen as the participants immersed themselves in their visualizations and became engaged in the descriptions of what they saw and felt in the imagery. This exercise seemed to remove intellectual constraints and allowed the intuitive senses to become open to the imagery. It relates to Sardello's (1992) suggestion:

> We are accustomed to taking concentration, meditation, picture-making (or imaging), and contemplation as belonging

> to individual consciousness when they are, it seems to me, a giving over of individual consciousness to the consciousness that is the soul of the world. Concentration is the art of forgetting our own subjectivity in order to be fully available to what presents itself. (p. 25)

For each participant, a significant image appeared easily, without involving rational thought or planning. The imagery appeared so quickly that both the participants and the researcher expressed surprise at the ease and uninhibited nature of the experience. There was no hesitation in selection and the images sustained their intense and deepening interest throughout the entire research project. The connection to the images was immediate, definite and clear, allowing the participants to describe them in intimate and precise detail of line, form, color and sensation. So graphic were their descriptions that it is a simple task for a listener or reader to picture these images in their own imaginations and feel the sensations inherent therein. According to Jung (1964), such images are not chosen arbitrarily but, instead, are a spontaneous expression of an inner experience.

Each individual expressed a deep personal connection and emotional bond to their image, recognizing that it was unique to their own experiences in life. They all indicated a desire to recreate the image in an artistic medium so that it could be shared with others who were close to them. They seemed to

feel that the recreation of the images would assist in the definition and the ownership of the experience. In all cases, the appearance of the images evoked a sense of a crucial meaning and understanding that was below the level of clear conceptual expression.

The ability to see or imagine an image clearly and fully enough to be able to recreate it, in paint, pencil, clay or photograph, requires an intense and intimate involvement with the image, a focused connection to the image. The act of connection requires that an individual be fully aware, fully attentive and fully receptive in their observation. It requires a detachment from the diversions of daily life and is not a product of a distracted or inattentive mind. The process of truly seeing an image requires a connection with that image so intense and so intimate as to touch its very essence. This type of seeing goes far beyond a mere looking at or simple observation but involves, instead, a true communion with that image. As stated by Franck (1981), this process requires the release of conscious thought and intellectual judgment combined with an undivided wakefulness to the imaging experience. Jones (1992) also says that engagement in the process of identifying imagery means allowing oneself the freedom to become totally involved in an emotional, rather than intellectual, experience. The participants in this study reported such a connection and communion with the imagery, facilitated by the process of physical relaxation and focused attention to their inner selves. Their images remained, both on paper and in their minds, as clear and

tangible evidence of a profound communication with their inner world. Boyd and Myers (1988) identify this connection in their receptivity stage of transformative education theory where they state, "Here the person assumes the posture of listener, open to receive symbols, images and alternative expressions of meaning . . . " (p. 277). Washburn (1988) also defines this as part of a transitional experience whereby an individual undergoes a process of allowing insights from the collective unconscious via nonrational means, such as symbols and images.

Significance of the imagery

The second theme emerging in the research was the personal significance the imagery had for each individual in their own life and their own search for understanding. Prior to the research, each had been struggling with questions about personal growth and direction. Each was at a midpoint in their life, often a period of transition for adults, and had been aware of the approach of a time of choice and change. The appearance of the imagery, as experienced by each of them in the research exercise, acted as a catalyst to stimulate a flow of information and guidance from an inner place of knowing.

The imagery acted as a language of the unconscious, opening channels of communication that had not previously been explored. The images, in their symbolism, became a focal point for the discourse between their creators and the realm of meaning that they were exploring and

expressing. This is a personal emotional discourse, not confined to the intellect, not bounded by language barriers, and not limited by levels of literacy (Jung, 1964). It is a type of discourse that has existed throughout the history of humankind (Ross, 1986). It is deeply personal in its meaning, yet worldly in its implications. Whitmont (1991) agrees that the knowing resident in the unconscious speaks to us, not via a verbal language, but via imagery through fantasies and deep reflections, which he refers to as an aboriginal mode of perception and expression. The depiction of these images provides a release of deep layers of understanding from the unconscious. Boyd and Myers (1988) refer to this as part of a process whereby the ego and the collective unconscious are integrated through internal and nonrational forces.

Images have meanings that are often far beyond and far more complex than we are able to express verbally. Frequently the conscious understanding escapes us completely until we have the opportunity to view that understanding in the form of an image that expresses our inner knowing in a non emotional and objective manner. Art does not reproduce what is already visible to our intellectual eye and our conscious mind but, instead, makes visible that which is hidden, obscured, veiled or denied (Cameron, 1992). In this research, the participants all expressed an unveiling of meaning when examining their imagery. It was an exposure of significant meaning that had been previously unavailable to them. Marilyn experienced an understanding related to acceptance and a release of the need to control

all aspects of her life. She expressed a desire to trust her natural creative instincts in allowing her life to evolve without rigid structure. David sensed a knowledge of a time of choice, a leap of faith awaiting him in his personal and artistic growth. Joanne acknowledged a desire for the expression of joy and a recognition of the beauty inherent in her being. The experience of viewing and examining the imagery acted as a bridge (Jung, 1964) to the unconscious understanding they already possessed, but had not yet consciously accessed. The creation of imagery is the act of making inner understanding visible.

Discourse, contemplation and critical reflection are recognized as part of the adult transitional process. Mezirow (1991) acknowledges that contemplation and critical reflection on personal metaphoric images is an important and powerful connection to our underlying beliefs, assumptions and personal understandings. Through the use of images, an individual has the opportunity to interact with their own inner experience and to reflect on their personal knowing about their world. It allows for an unprejudiced view and expression of the interpretation of sensation as experienced by each of us. Through reflection, contemplation and discourse with one's own metaphoric imagery, an individual becomes actively involved in the examination of personal meaning perspectives, the evaluation of perceptions and sensory influences, and the validation of the personal socialization process.

Engagement in this activity encourages a liberation of personal vision and a redefinition of previously accepted frameworks of meaning.

Boyd and Myers (1988), discuss the process of recognition and open interaction with the extrarational messages that come from the unconscious, stating that these expressions of meaning may ". . . bring to awareness information incompatible with previously held attitudes and assumptions about one's self" (p. 275). This was certainly the case with the participants in the study who each identified and connected with an image that sparked discussion and invited reflection on its meaning and significance in their lives. Marilyn connected with an image which she identified as representing a move toward acceptance, and is now regularly participating in the practice of meditation and reflection. David connected with an image he recognized as representing the need for choice, and has become active in exhibiting and promoting his artwork to the public. Joanne connected with an image which she saw as directing her toward joyfulness, leading her to a desire to interact artistically with others in a manner that will nurture this aspect of herself. The reflection and interaction with the imagery continued long after the interview and imaging exercise had ended and was still ongoing months later. The images raised questions and suggested answers or directions about philosophical issues in their lives and assisted in the beginnings of a redirection of purpose.

In the identification and connection with personal imagery, there seems to exist a correlation to the position of Freire (1970) on the naming of a reality. He suggests that when an individual is fully and consciously able to give a name to their own personal reality, to describe it in objective and concrete terms, they can come to a true and complete understanding of it. Through exploration in a safe environment it is possible to fully assimilate and claim ownership of an experience and, if desired, change or alter the experience. Freire's naming is the next step in the identification process of creating a symbolic image, which similarly identifies an experience or an understanding. Putting a cognitive label on the image brings it into a more focused awareness. It is the objectified and external expression of the experience, making it available for reflection and exploration.

In summarizing the second theme, the inner reality of an individual is comprised of images that represent knowing, understanding, sensation and impressions. The recollection and visual expression of these images can aid in grasping their significance and implication in present situations or transitional experiences. The purpose underlying the use of image making is to establish a method of conceptualizing and objectifying inner sensations so that they may be examined and explored in conscious rational terms.

In times of transition, we seek guidance and direction. Such guidance can come from within if we learn to access and transfer the inner knowing from our unconscious to our conscious minds. If we have the tools of imagery

and give ourselves permission to use them, we can easily find and connect with our own inner intelligence. This inner knowing is an expression of our humanity and our wholeness. The image becomes a witness to the truth of one's inner knowing, one's profound and personal understanding. There is a relationship to the post-Jungian theories of Boyd (1988) and Washburn (1988), wherein they suggest that contemplative insight, wholeness, and an illumination of the Self can be achieved through receptivity to internal and non rational forces presented in the form of images through the imagination and intuition.

Cultural and educational context

The third theme emerging from the research was the realization that the process of accessing our own inner knowing through exploration of our perceptions and critical reflection on our emotional sensations is not encouraged or, in most cases, even approved of in our current society and educational system. Schooling today is obsessed with facts and techniques. The personal energy and vision in and from which real art emerges is never understood because it is never taught or experienced. Most people in our communities still carry a severe judgment against anything artistic or any activities involved with the creation of imagery. These activities are often

viewed as being frivolous, outside the realm of responsible behavior, and not worthy of serious educational pursuit.

Many adults today state that they are not creative, that they cannot draw properly, and experience fear and a sense of inadequacy when asked to express themselves with imagery. Occasionally some tentatively suggest a hidden desire to reconnect with that part of themselves that allowed creative expression in imagery when they were children, but this is usually quickly overshadowed by the societal judgment that imagery and creativity are reserved for the selected few who have been labeled as professional artists. As Jagodinski (1986) observes, participation in creativity, imagery and the arts is divorced from the daily functions of education and living. It is practiced and appreciated by only a rare and gifted few, and is not considered an integral part of the normal experience of living. This study cleary shows that the process of creating and interacting with creative imagery is a crucial part of personal and art education.

We all, at least occasionally, enjoy the experience and expression of our imagination. The word imagining, when broken down into its components consists of the terms "image", and "in". It is the process of allowing or inviting an image into our mind, our consciousness. Moore (1994) says, "Imagination is a sign of the soul at work" (p. 148). Sardello (1992) states, "Imagination is a mode of knowledge" (p. 13). Yet, in nearly all instances our society holds a negative judgment of this activity of "image-in-ing". It is not scientific, it is not

considered productive and, therefore, it is not seen to be worthwhile. It is certainly not something that serious and mature people are encouraged to engage in but, rather, is reserved for those rare times when there is nothing more noteworthy to do. The participants in this study clearly expressed the feeling that their own artistic and imaginative experiences were subordinated and submerged by the more socially acceptable activities of community living. Marilyn and Joanne suggested a need to be employed in recognized jobs or career positions so as to manage both socially and financially, expressing a fear of delving into artistic pursuits on a full-time basis. David questioned his decision to forgo regular employment and often felt tempted by the conditioned lure of a job or career. They all indicated sensing a necessity to engage in pragmatic and worldly activities before allowing themselves to explore and interact with their own intuitive and imaginative processes. Each heard the echoing voices of parents and teachers extolling them to complete their real work before engaging the imagination. In all cases, the work ethic taught to them in their early years, interfered with their ability to immerse themselves in and enjoy their own imaginative and creative abilities.

In our contemporary society, we are barraged with imagery in all forms from multiple media sources. As a matter of coping, we must become immune to this assault or we cannot handle the visual and emotional overload. In the process of sensory blocking, we often learn to also block our own inner imagery and, consequently, become inoculated against the rich

experience of exploring and communing with our inner sources of knowing. The more we block, the less we are able to enjoy and appreciate the fullness of ourselves and our lives. In order to draw, paint, sculpt or photograph an expressive image, one must connect with it so fully as to see it from its ultimate center. This requires an intensified perception and awareness. It cannot be accomplished if one is not fully in touch with the rhythms and the energies of one's own life forces and personal sense of being. To accomplish this, the image creator must also be in touch with their own center, as was the case in the relaxation and concentration exercise of the participants in the study. Such a process, by its nature, compels a deep sense of respect and compassion for the nature and energy of the image in question. In this study all participants expressed a recognition of the connection of the image to the fundamental energies of the earth and the natural environment. They showed an awakened excitement for the rediscovery of those aspects of nature that had originally intrigued and tempted them into the practice of image making. This connection surely would then preclude the destruction or harm of an image of nature to which one has become so compassionately connected. Once that connection, that oneness, has been established, there is a profound understanding of the symbiosis we share with our earth.

If we truly learn to see, rather than just look at, the world in which we live we can expect a growing sense of responsibility and connectedness to that world. If we deny the importance of aesthetic sensitivity to our internal

and external imagery, and condition ourselves to become numbed to the messages contained therein, we can expect to become estranged from the beauty and meaning that nature has provided for us. Franck (1981) suggests that awakening to and connecting with the imagery of our world increases our capacity for experience and for openness to that which is essentially human. It is the responsibility of our educational system to nurture the profound connection between ourselves and the world around us. The exploration and recreation of imagery, both internal and external, can enhance this connection and communication with our internal and external environments. In this way, we can teach and learn an awareness, a perception and an appreciation for the life we share with all other aspects of our existence.

Returning to the research questions: To what extent is it possible for adults to process their understanding of life transitions through image making? Is image making a meaningful process in this context? To what extent is image making meaningful? To what extent can image making be encouraged and used in educational endeavors?

This study suggests that the use of images as tools for accessing and expressing emotional and ultimately conscious understanding of life transitions is indeed significant. The imagery was readily available for the participants and seemed profoundly and personally meaningful in this context.

In all cases the participants easily and quickly connected with images of importance that carried messages of personal meaning for them. The process of discovery involved a removal of the restraints and restrictions of daily living and a release of the judgments and limitations of the conscious mind, thus allowing the inner knowing, framed by the imagery, to come forward. Finally, the participants trusted that the understanding received came from a place of collective significance.

Implications for Adult Education

The final question asks to what extent image making can be encouraged and used in educational endeavors. In this discussion, the term education refers to all aspects of learning and life situations, and is not limited to learning in the classroom.

At this time, when adult education is very rational and instrumental, there is a need for balance and acknowledgment of the artistic side of our nature. It is important for adults to be encouraged to participate in artistic endeavors as a way to accelerate their growth processes and bring their development into conscious awareness. Imagery assists in the search for meaning in our post modern world that has become fragmented and dissociated from meaning. Our society has so standardized the human educational experience that there is no room left for spontaneity, individuality

and creativity. Focus is primarily on the pragmatic, the utilitarian, the scientific. Aesthetic activities have been severed from the practice of daily life and relegated merely to the leisure hours. As Jagodinski (1986) states,

> Postindustrial society anesthetized, standardized, and homogenized human experiences. Work and play became dichotomized, and aesthetics was reduced to the consumption of popular culture during leisure time. (p. 17)

The expression of personal imagery represents a break from conformity, a development of individuality in a society that insists on mass unity. The artistic process may be the only way to get in touch with deeper unconscious meaning crucial to a person's life direction and quality. Creativity is one's own personal expression of the world, one's own internal interpretation of reality in all its various and individual forms. It represents a break from the numbing mindlessness of normalcy and awakens us, even if only momentarily, to the mystery and meaning of our world.

Adult education needs to encourage us to allow meaning to come to us internally. Most adults tend to search externally for meaning but the participants in this study each expressed in their own way that there could be meaningful images available from within. Boyd and Myers (1988) suggest,

> . . . education must adopt the end-in-view of helping individuals work towards acknowledging and understanding the dynamics between their inner and outer worlds. For the learner, this means the expansion of consciousness and the working toward a meaningful integrated life as evidenced in authentic relationships with self and others. (p. 261)

The development of an integrated internal world balances the chaos that seems to be present in the external world. If there is no balance, there is disharmony in the individual and therefore in the external world.

The post-Jungian movement sees the quality and awareness of the individual as being fundamental to the overall quality of the society. To paraphrase Matthew Fox (1983), a society that employs its artists is highly advanced. Sardello (1992) suggests that it is the beauty of the world which brings us out of ourselves to connect with the soul of the world. It moves us beyond the conformity of institutionalized materialism and opens us to engagement with the true reality of our surroundings. This engagement with our world produces a caring, an empathy, a concern for the health and continuation of the world in which we live.

Franck (1993) says, "It is art that which despite all gives hope" (p. 154).

It gives hope that through sensitivity to the expression of beauty in our surroundings and sensitivity to the knowledge we possess within, we can develop and encourage responsible and ethical concern for ourselves, for our fellow beings and for the environment in which we live.

Personal Reflections

The research and writing of this thesis has been a rewarding and growth-filled experience for me. It has demonstrated to me how research can be guided and influenced by the conscious and unconscious beliefs and assumptions of the individuals involved in it. It has shown me the uppermost importance of trustworthiness and rigor throughout all aspects of the study, realizing all the while that, as researcher, my biases nonetheless have tremendous influence on the outcome. I am left with a deep respect for the process of reflectivity and dialogue as one attempts to travel the tangled path of scientific discovery. Only through honest personal reflection can we begin to understand the context of our own interpretations. Those questions that remain unasked are as revealing as those that are. Perhaps even more so.

I have long believed that we choose, often unconsciously, life experiences that will further our own personal development and

understanding. These experiences beckon us to follow their educative path and to learn what we are already eager and ready to know. My own journey has been a search for and a struggle with the experience of imagery. Social direction led me first to a pragmatic career in the health sciences, but part of me continued to be drawn to the mystery of imagery. Well into adult life, I undertook formal training in the techniques of the visual arts. Following the completion of degrees, diplomas and certificates from university, college and art schools, I continued to question the reasons behind the compulsion to create imagery. I had mastered techniques and doctrine in many media, but still searched for the soul I believed inherent in the creative process.

This thesis has answered many of my questions. After studying and searching for nearly twenty years, I finally underwent the "Aha" experience of understanding, at least in part, some of the mystery and attraction embodied in a creative drive to visualize and produce personally significant images. These images are our own interpretation of and connection to the essence of our experience in the world. They express the awareness of an individual who has, at least briefly, reached into their own soul and connected it with the soul of the external environment. They represent a joining of the internal world we feel and the external world we see. The creative process liberates and enhances our abilities to feel, to know and to appreciate the life, love, loyalty and connection that developes our own personal sense of depth and identity. This is essential to the formation of deeply committed relations,

dedicated freindships and life purposes which provide meaning to our existence.

The research has been a powerful personal learning experience for me and I would like to extend a thank you to the participants for sharing so openly and honestly with me. I believe we all grew in our own understanding of ourselves through this process and I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with such sincere and willing individuals.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANTS REQUIRED FOR RESEARCH STUDY

Have you experienced major changes in your relationships, work or family that have made a real impact on your life? Can you identify experiences or events in your adult life that were especially meaningful, significant or intense for you? Do you have experience working with art and the process of image making?

If you are interested in reflecting back upon an experience in your life that is personally significant, and would like to gain more understanding about your own learning, personal growth and development that resulted, I would love to hear from you. The information gathered will be incorporated into a thesis written for a Masters degree in Adult Education.

Participants will engage in confidential personal interviews with the researcher and partake in some image creation exercises. Complete anonymity is guaranteed. This experience will provide an opportunity to further your own personal learning and will add to the growing body of research on adult learning and development.

Please contact Verna Gregson at 247-8404 if you would like to participate or require more information. Thank you for your interest.

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The intent of this form is to outline the purpose of the study, the parameters that will guide the research, and your rights as participants.

The focus of this study is the learning that results through art and image creation during significance life events or transitions experienced as an adult. You will be asked to explore your personal experience in the creation of images and to reflect on the inner importance of this process.

There are several components to the study, which will span three interviews with the researcher, lasting one hour each. You will be asked to discuss your own experience and the personal forces behind the creation of your art and imagery. You will be asked to reflect upon a significant life event or transition, to participate in the creation of an image to represent that event, and to enter into dialogue with the researcher regarding the impact of this process. The interviews will be audiotaped and a written transcript will be provided to you after each interview. The researcher will be reading the transcripts and identifying themes and trends that emerge. These will be shared with you for verification and accuracy. You will also be asked to write down and share with the researcher any insights, perceptions, feelings or thoughts that may come to mind between the interviews.

All information collected will be confidential and any reference to your name, or where you work or live will be changed to protect your anonymity. Phrases and/or sentences from the interview transcripts will be included in the final written thesis document, but no reference will be made to you personally.

The following have been outlined as your rights as a participant in this study:

1. You may decline to answer any question during an interview that you do not feel comfortable addressing. Due to the personal nature of the research and the potential emotional component of the subject matter, please be advised that intense feelings may be aroused during the interviews. If you are not comfortable discussing any of these with the researcher, you may decline.

2. You may stop the interview at any time if you do not wish to proceed.

3. You may withdraw from the study at any time you feel you no longer wish to be involved.

4. You will be assured anonymity regarding all the information you provide to the researcher.

5. You will be provided with transcripts of all the interviews you participate in and will also receive a copy of the analysis of all the data collected for the study.

Thank you again for taking the time to engage in this study. We hope this will be as valuable a learning experience for you as it is for me. I look forward to working with you.

Verna Gregson

_____
Name

_____

_____
Signature of Participant

_____
Address

_____
Home phone

_____
Signature of Researcher

_____
Work phone

Date

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW 1

The following questions were used to guide the first interview:

1. What can you tell me about the beginnings of your experience with art?

2. What are the personal forces behind the creation of your art and your imagery? That is, what drives your art, what makes you create?

3. Do you work with an end-product in mind, or is your art work process oriented? Can you describe how this works?

4. Throughout your adult years, have there been any changes in your experience of your artistic expression?
   Changes in imagery? Changes in media? Changes in focus or direction? Changes in feeling or emotion attached to your work?

5. How do these changes reflect events in your life experience?

6. Are you aware of any personal insights or understandings you have gained through your experience with art? Can you discuss these?

7. Are you aware of any personal symbols or images that are important or recurring in your art work? Can you discuss these?

8. How does your art make you feel?

9. How important is your art experience in your day-to-day life?

10. How important would you like it to be? Why?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW 2

The following questions were used to guide the second interview:

1. What can you tell me about this image?

2. How do you feel about the image?

3. How are you connected to the image?

4. If the image were to send you a message, what would it be?

5. If you could speak to the image, what would you say?

6. If this image represents a chapter in your life, what else can you tell us about it?

7. What would this image have looked like 10 years ago?

8. What might it look like 10 years from now?

9. Is there hope in your image?

10. Does the image have a title?

11. What will you do with this image?